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ABSTRACT

This booklet for parents and other nonprofessionals contains information on helping children learn. Part I is divided into the following brief sections: (1) "The Wonder of It All"; (2) "Ready?"; (3) "Get Set..."; (4) "Go!"; (5) "Dialogues"; (6) "Decisions"; (7) "Dilemmas"; (8) "Learning Experiences"; (9) "Problem-Solving"; and (10) "Feeling Good about Helping." An added note helps parents understand learning problems. Part II contains lists of six Internet and four agency resources and some print resources professionals can draw on to help parents and other nonprofessionals enhance children's learning and performance. Part III lists several guides and other basic resources parents can use to enhance children's learning and performance. These are grouped into resources for helping a child with homework and a consumer guide for self-help. (SLD)

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ED 425 231

*From the Center's Clearinghouse ...**

A Technical Aid Packet on

Guiding Parents in Helping Children Learn

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* The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 -- Phone: (310) 825-3634.

Support comes in part from the Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Public Health Service
HRSA
Health Resources & Services Administration
Maternal & Child Health Bureau
Office of Adolescent Health

UCLA CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Department of Psychology at UCLA, our center approaches mental health and psychosocial concerns from the broad perspective of addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development. Specific attention is given policies and strategies that can counter fragmentation and enhance collaboration between school and community programs.

MISSION: ***To improve outcomes for young people by enhancing policies, programs, and practices relevant to mental health in schools.***

Through collaboration, the center will

- **enhance practitioner roles, functions and competence**
- **interface with systemic reform movements to strengthen mental health in schools**
- **assist localities in building and maintaining their own infrastructure for training, support, and continuing education that fosters integration of mental health in schools**

Consultation Cadre ***Clearinghouse***

Newsletter ***National & Regional Meetings***

Electronic Networking

Guidebooks ***Policy Analyses***

Co-directors: Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor
Address: UCLA, Dept. of Psychology, 405 Hilgard Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563.
Phone: (310) 825-3634 FAX: (310) 206-8716 E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu
Website: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/

*In 1996, two national training and technical assistance centers focused on mental health in schools were established with partial support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health. As indicated, one center is located at UCLA; the other is at the University of Maryland at Baltimore and can be contacted toll free at 1-(888) 706-0980.

What is the Center's Clearinghouse?

The scope of the Center's Clearinghouse reflects the School Mental Health Project's mission -- to enhance the ability of schools and their surrounding communities to address mental health and psychosocial barriers to student learning and promote healthy development. Those of you working so hard to address these concerns need ready access to resource materials. The Center's Clearinghouse is your link to specialized resources, materials, and information. The staff supplements, compiles, and disseminates resources on topics fundamental to our mission. As we identify what is available across the country, we are building systems to connect you with a wide variety of resources. Whether your focus is on an individual, a family, a classroom, a school, or a school system, we intend to be of service to you. Our evolving catalogue is available on request; eventually it will be accessible electronically over the Internet.

What kinds of resources, materials, and information are available?

We can provide or direct you to a variety of resources, materials, and information that we have categorized under three areas of concern:

- Specific psychosocial problems
- Programs and processes
- System and policy concerns

Among the various ways we package resources are our *Introductory Packets, Resource Aid Packets, special reports, guidebooks*, and *continuing education units.* These encompass overview discussions of major topics, descriptions of model programs, references to publications, access information to other relevant centers, organizations, advocacy groups, and Internet links, and specific tools that can guide and assist with training activity and student/family interventions (such as outlines, checklists, instruments, and other resources that can be copied and used as information handouts and aids for practice).

Accessing the Clearinghouse

- E-mail us at **smhp@ucla.edu**
- FAX us at (310) 206-8716
- Phone (310) 825-3634
- Write School Mental Health Project/Center for Mental Health in Schools, Dept. of Psychology, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

Check out recent additions to the Clearinghouse on our Web site
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

All materials from the Center's Clearinghouse are available for a minimal fee to cover the cost of copying, handling, and postage. Eventually, we plan to have some of this material and other Clearinghouse documents available, at no-cost, on-line for those with Internet access.

If you know of something we should have in the clearinghouse, let us know.

Preface

Those of you working hard to address barriers to student learning and promote healthy development need ready access to resource materials. The Center's Clearinghouse compiles, supplements, and disseminates resources on topics fundamental to enabling students to learn. Among the various ways we package these resources are our Technical Aid Packets.

This Technical Aid Packet is designed for use by those who work with parents and other nonprofessionals. It contains three types of aids.

(1) The first aid is a "booklet" written for nonprofessionals to help them understand what is involved in helping children learn. In some cases, this can be offered directly as material to read -- in sections or as a total package; in other cases, the material can be used as a resource and guide in preparing presentations.

(2) The second aid consists of information about basic resources professionals can draw on to learn more about helping parents and other nonprofessionals enhance children's learning and performance.

(3) The third aid includes additional guides and basic information to share with parents as resources they can use to enhance a child's learning and performance.

Guiding Parents in Helping Children Learn

Contents

I. A booklet for parents and other nonprofessionals

Helping Children Learn: Ready? Get Set... Go!

The Wonder of It All
Ready?
Get Set...
Go!
"Dialogues"
Decisions
Dilemmas
Learning Experiences
Problem-Solving
Feeling Good About helping
An Added Note on Understanding Learning Problems

II. Basic Resources Professionals Can Draw on to Help Parents and Other Nonprofessionals Enhance Children's Learning and Performance

- Internet and Agency/Organization Resources
- A Few Selected References

III. Guides and Other Basic Resources Parents Can Draw Upon to Enhance Children's Learning and Performance

- Helping Your Child with Schoolwork
- Consumer Guide for Self-help

Part I:

A Booklet for Parents and Other Nonprofessionals

Helping Children Learn:

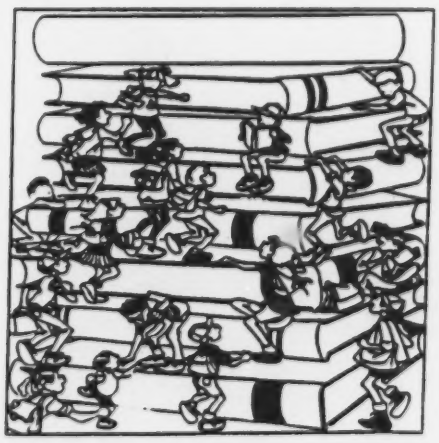
Ready?

Get Set...

GO!

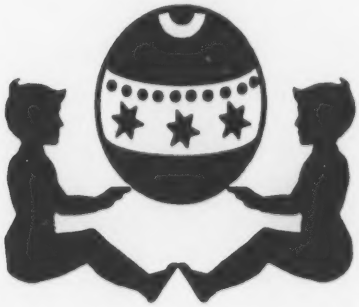
Contents

	Pages
The Wonder of It All	1
Ready?	3
Get Set . . .	5
Go!	10
"Dialogues"	18
Decisions	24
Dilemmas	30
Learning Experiences	37
Problem-Solving	44
Feeling Good About Helping	50
An Added Note on Understanding Learning Problems	52



The Wonder of it All

"How does the picture get into the television?"
"Where did the sun come from?"
"Why does ...."



Helping children learn can be such a wondrous experience. Their eyes light up, the world opens wide to them, and they develop a sense of being somebody. They are often delighted and amazed. And, at the very least, they feel just a little bit smarter. Through their questions we are reminded of the wonder of it all.

"I wish I had asked more questions when I was your age."

"How come?"

"So I could answer more of yours."

Children learn from many people.

Remember who taught you to ride your bike?
Remember that "special" school teacher?

People who try to help others learn *are* special.

They seem to act out of love not obligation. They see learning as a natural part of living; they nurture a child's sense of discovery and desire to search, learn, and grow.

In John Steinbeck's words, his special "teachers" were people who

...did not tell--they catalyzed a burning desire to know. Under their influence, the horizons sprang wide and fear went away and the unknown became knowable.

Helping someone grow, develop, and learn is one of the most basic forms of human interaction. With just a little effort and care, anyone can help.

And, there is simply nothing to equal the satisfaction of helping the next generation explore the world and its wonders.

Fortunately, helping children learn isn't hard to do, but it can be a bit tricky. Like so many other things, in helping, you get ready by thinking about what you want to do. Then, you get set and go. There is no one right way -- no simple set of techniques or recipe or magical prescription. There are some ideas that lead in the right direction and away from problems.

But helping is more of an attitude than a set of methods and techniques. In the final analysis, it is much more important to adopt the right stance than to have the right answer.

Your goal may be to enrich a youngster's experiences or to prevent or correct learning problems. Whether you're a parent, teacher, or a friend who wants to help, what is discussed on the following pages can aid in meeting your objectives.

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Ready?

Parent to 7 year old:

"I like what you wrote, but you forgot to dot your I's."

"I didn't forget; they're still in my pencil."

You want to help or you wouldn't be reading this.

Every caring person has a role to play in helping the next generation enjoy today and prepare for the demands of tomorrow. Since there is so much that people must know in our competitive world, we look for ways to help children get a head start. And we look for ways to help them avoid problems.

We want them to have *"the best"*.

And so we offer to help.

But most of us worry a bit about helping

"Do we know the right way to do it?"

"Will we be effective?"

And after we begin, there are nagging doubts.

"Is Larry learning the right things?"

"Is there a better way to help Chris?"

And we remember times when we were disappointed.

"I spent a lot of time helping Sue last week, but she didn't seem to get it."

1?

As we get ready to help, we get in touch with a lot of feelings and thoughts about what children should learn and why. While determined to do the best we can, we may feel scared we won't be able to.

It's good to be aware of these feelings and thoughts for they influence our efforts.

You will find some feelings and ideas improve the help you give. If you think children are natural learners and you enjoy being with them while they pursue their interests, that's a good starting place.

Other feelings can get in the way. If you're not very interested in what children think or are angry at a particular child, you probably won't help and may even hurt the child. And if helping doesn't go well, frustration and disappointment can lead to conflicts and, ironically, may even produce learning and behavior problems.

Sorting through your feelings is a big step in *getting ready* to help youngsters learn.

The next step is getting *set* by developing a helping stance.

Get Set...

"Do you understand the questions?"

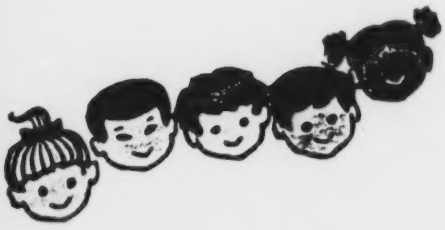
"Sure. The questions are easy; it's the answers that are hard to figure out"

Getting set to help someone learn involves moving from "I" and "you" to "us" and "we".

A good place to start in getting set is to think about what you believe are the most important things children should learn.

What should children learn?

Take a few minutes and use the space below to jot down what you think of as essential.



If you made a list, it probably reflects many things you've learned and found useful over the years and perhaps things you didn't learn and wish you had.

You may have felt uncomfortable making such a list. Most of us feel uneasy about predicting the future. Lists made today make good sense for today, but what will be in the best interest of a particular child 10... 20... 30 years from now?

We want the best for each child, but what *is* best?

WHO KNOWS WHAT'S BEST?

Some of what schools teach would be on most people's list of things children should learn – language skills, arithmetic, and science – "the basics"; things everyone should know and be able to do.

But *what's best* for children involves much more than just basics. And helping children learn involves much more than just teaching.

Jimmy hates school. He hates to read, and he hates anyone who tries to make him read. At school each day, he does as little work as possible. The more the teachers push him, the more he pushes back.

His parents are concerned and are beginning to work with him at home each night. He doesn't like that any better than he likes being pushed at school. But he doesn't want to give his parents trouble; so he goes through the motions.

If you didn't know how to read or type or drive a car or run a machine or organize your time – *and you wanted* to learn the skill – good teaching or training could be very helpful. But, if you were indifferent or didn't want to learn it, chances are the training program wouldn't succeed.

Mother: "Well, Jimmy, how do you like school?"
Jimmy: *"Closed!"*

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When children don't want to learn what's being taught or don't like the way it's taught, they often become upset with their "teachers" and stop viewing them as people to contact when help is needed. Parents and teachers are painfully made aware of this after they've had to *force* a child in relation to some learning situation.

When a youngster is forced, it usually is because the activity is felt to be in the child's best interest.

"In the long-run, it will be helpful to him."

"She'll thank me for it later."

Maybe so.
But maybe not.

In the last analysis, what's helpful is defined by the person being helped. If actions are experienced as helpful, then they can be defined as helping. Otherwise what is involved is socialization in the form of unwanted training.

Most of us find ourselves in helping roles at various times and in socializing roles at other times. It's good to understand and accept both roles--and to realize they are sometimes not compatible.

Father: (in a helpful tone) "Jimmy, don't forget that 4 o'clock is medicine-taking time."

Jimmy: "O.K., dad, but if I don't remember, go ahead without me."

THE RIGHT STANCE FOR HELPING

A helping stance is a set of beliefs and attitudes about helping, learning and children.

What's the right stance for helping children learn? Well...

If you want to help

and

if you believe that children are learners by nature

and

if you don't have too many preconceived notions about what they should learn,

then

YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK!

It's also good to appreciate that not only can you help children learn, you can also learn *from* children.

Jack had just finished washing up after laying a new cement driveway. When he came back outside, he found his neighbor's kids writing their initials in the fresh concrete. He grabbed the kids and took them next door to complain to their parents.

" I'm sorry." they said, "But kids will be kids. You do like children, don't you?"

" Well," replied Jack, "I guess I like them more in the abstract than in the *concrete."*

Picture yourself setting out to help Jimmy.

Because he has not been performing well, you may be anticipating the worst. But Jimmy has many things he's curious about, things he finds relevant to his life, things he wants to learn more about, problems he wants to solve.

There's always more than enough that children *want* help with to keep us busy.

"But," you may be thinking, "suppose what Jimmy wants help with is something I don't see as very worthwhile or as in his best interest in the long-run."

Then, you don't have to help with those things.

"But suppose Jimmy just hasn't realized that there are important things it would be better to spend the time on?"

Let him know you think so and why. If he agrees and wants help, that's great. If he disagrees, helping in those areas is out for now. If it's a major concern, you may decide to try teaching or training anyway--but don't expect him to thank you -- and get set for the backlash.

"Backlash -- that's something I really want to avoid."

You can, as long as you keep focused on *helping* Jimmy create learning experiences that feel right to *both* of you.

Adopt a helping stance, and you're ready to go.

There is no one right method or
technique in helping,
but there is a right stance.

GO!

"Will you do my homework for me?"

"No. It wouldn't be right if I did it."

"It's O.K. -- I don't get them all right either."

One of the most basic ideas in all teaching is to "start from where the learner is at".

What that adage usually means is that a teacher should try to find a way to match new experiences with what the learner already knows.

But there is a bit more to it than that.

If you're ready to go, let's talk about two ideas that are basic to helping someone learn.

They are

THE MATCH

and

THE PACT

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THE MATCH

If you've tried to help others learn, you've probably found that what you do seems just right for one person, but not for another.

Why the differences?

Because people are different.

Even two children the same age and from similar backgrounds have many different interests and capabilities. They differ in what they *want* to learn and in what they can learn at any particular moment.

> Sue, age 5, wants every street sign and billboard read and then tries to read the words herself the next time she sees them. She loves to look at picture books and frequently asks her parents to tell her what the words under a picture say. And she remembers many of them.
>
> Sally, age 5, pays no attention to words and books. She's busy playing with her friends and her pets. She tells more than she asks. She knows more about caring for and breeding animals than many children twice her age.

The two girls are clearly motivated to learn about different things. And both seem to be learning quite a bit about the things that interest them -- the things they are *motivated to* learn about and are *developmentally* able to grasp.

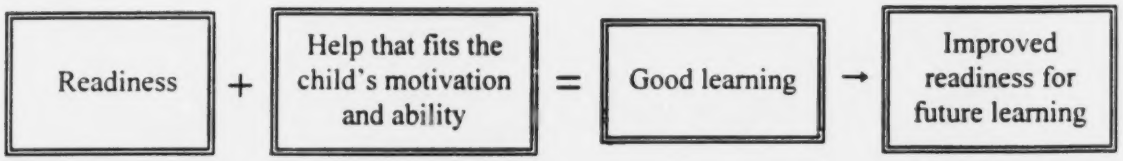
They are ready to learn, they are learning in different ways, and they are getting the type of help they need. There is a good match for learning, and learning is taking place.

To really understand what a good match feels like, remember the last time an abstract idea someone was trying to help you understand suddenly became clear. Or you finally saw how to solve a problem or puzzle you had been struggling with.

These magical moments of learning are times when you experienced a good match. Such moments don't have to be mystical or accidental. The more you understand about matching help to a child's current motivation and ability, the better you can plan ways to help a child learn.

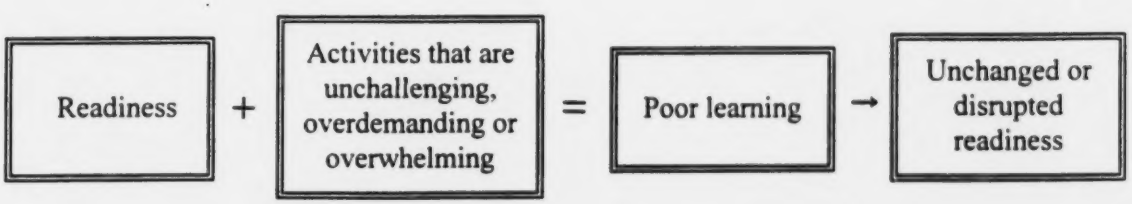
Like Goldilocks, people respond best to activities they perceive as being "just right."

A Good Match



Activities that are unchallenging, overdemanding, or overwhelming are a bad match.

A Bad Match



It is not always clear what has caused differences between children in readiness to learn. Some people argue that such differences are inborn; others argue that the differences reflect the way in which a child has been raised; others see both "nature" and "nurture" as responsible. (As one proud parent said, "I never believed genius was inherited until I had a child.)

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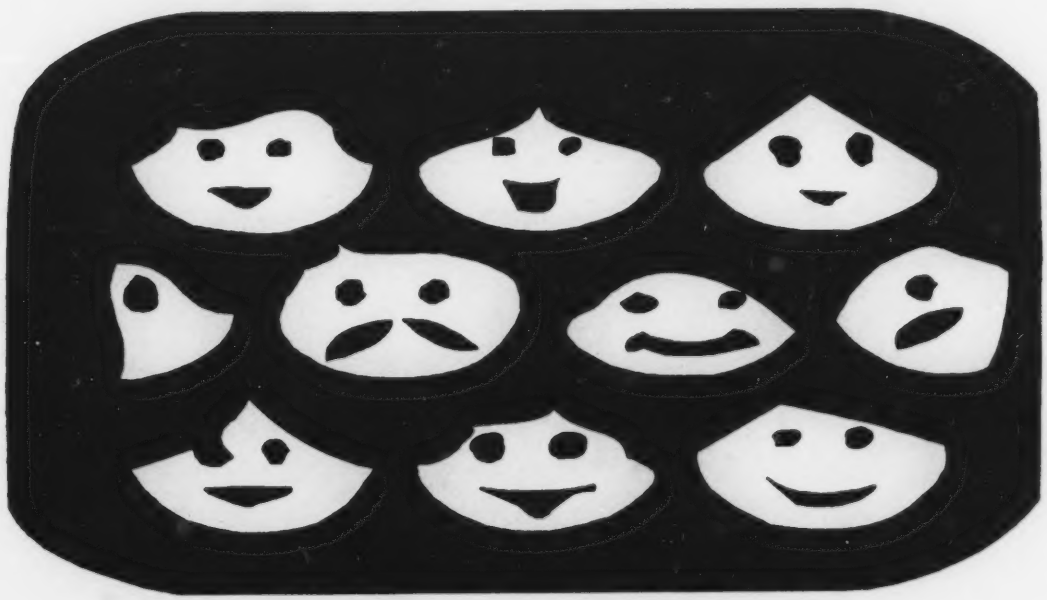
In helping others learn, it doesn't matter what caused individual differences. What does matter is that

- *there are differences*
- *help must be a good match for readiness*
- *a good match leads to good learning and improved readiness for future learning.*

Stop reading for a minute and tune in to yourself.

You may be interested, preoccupied, bored, or tired. Whatever your current state of readiness, it's easy to see that it affects your concentration and learning.



Children come to every situation with certain attitudes and abilities. In addition, they may be rested or tired, well-nourished or hungry, ready to participate or preoccupied; they may also feel happy, sad, or angry.

In helping someone learn, these matters should be taken into account. The more sensitive you are to such considerations, the more likely you will interact with the learner in ways that lead to a pretty good match for learning.

22

Once upon a time, the animals decided that their lives and their society would be improved by setting up a school. The basics identified as necessary for survival in the animal world were swimming, running, climbing, jumping, and flying. Instructors were hired to teach these activities and it was agreed that all the animals would take all the courses. This worked out well for the administrators, but it caused some problems for the students.

The squirrel, for example, was an A student in running, jumping, and climbing, but had trouble in flying class, not because of an inability to fly, for she could sail from the top of one tree to another with ease, but because the flying curriculum called for taking off from the ground. The squirrel was drilled in ground to air take-offs until she was exhausted and developed charley horses from overexertion. This caused her to perform poorly in her other classes, and her grades dropped to D's.

The duck was outstanding in swimming class--even better than the teacher. But she did so poorly in running that she was transferred to a remedial class. There she practiced running until her webbed feet were so badly damaged that she was only an average swimmer. But since average was acceptable, nobody saw this as a problem--except the duck.

In contrast, the rabbit was excellent in running, but being terrified of water, he was an extremely poor swimmer. Despite a lot of make up work in swimming class, he never could stay afloat. He soon became frustrated and uncooperative and was eventually expelled because of behavior problems.

The eagle naturally enough was a brilliant student in flying class and even did well in running and jumping. He had to be severely disciplined in climbing class, however, because he insisted that his way of getting to the top of the tree was faster and easier.

It should be noted that the parents of the groundhog pulled him out of school because the administration would not add classes in digging and burrowing. The groundhogs, along with the gophers and badgers, got a prairie dog to start a private school. They all have become strong opponents of school taxes.

By graduation time, the students with the best grades in the animal school was a compulsive ostrich who could run superbly and also could swim, fly, and climb a little. She, of course, was made class valedictorian and received scholarship offers from all the best universities.[1]

[1] George H. Reavis is credited with bringing this parable to America .

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How do you know if there is a good match?

Keep two questions in mind.

Does the child seem to think

that the activity is *worthwhile?*

that it *can be done* -- and
done without too much stress?

If the answers to either question are no, chances are the match is not a good one for learning.

If the answer to both questions is yes, you are on your way.

What makes something worthwhile? Prizes? Money? Merit awards? Praise?

Certainly!

We all do a great many things, some we don't even like to do, because the activity leads to a desired reward. Similarly, we often do things to escape negative consequences we prefer to avoid.

Because we do things to obtain rewards or avoid punishment, rewards and punishments are called reinforcers. Because extrinsic reinforcers are easy to use and can have immediate effects on behavior, they are widely used for training purposes (especially for people who don't particularly want to be trained).

But extrinsic reinforcers tend to be of limited use in helping. Sometimes they even interfere with good learning. Fortunately, many things are worth learning even though there is no apparent extrinsic reason for doing so.

Children, like the rest of us, are motivated to learn by their curiosity and desire to avoid boredom, and their need to feel competent and in control of their lives.

When extrinsics are overrelied upon in teaching, there is a risk of shifting a child's interest away from the learning agenda. What becomes important is how to get the reward or avoid the punishment. Too many youngsters become more interested in getting rewards (money, good grades, a new bicycle) than they are in what they are learning. ("If you're going to give me a dollar for reading 20 pages, can I still get a quarter if I just read 5?")

A shift in interest may also occur if a child is not given adequate support when he or she needs and wants it. Children like to conquer challenges. Without help, however, some challenges may be seem as unconquerable or make the child feel too uncomfortable (anxious, fatigued, lacking hope for success). In such instances, youngsters often try to move on to something less stressful and more promising.

Inappropriate shifts in interest can be prevented by

- emphasizing intrinsic reasons for learning
- providing the support and guidance the youngster believes is needed.

I wonder, so I search. I search, and I discover. I discover, and I learn.

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THE PACT

The decision to help a child learn is not made by either the helper or the child alone. It is decided by mutual agreement.

In helping, agreements may be informal, but they are clearly made and revised as often as necessary.

In words and actions, the child communicates what she or he wants to learn, asks for and gives information, seeks guidance and support, explores, relates feelings and reactions, and makes decisions and agreements.

In words and actions, you communicate your understanding of what the child wants, give and ask for information, provide guidance and support, share in the exploration, relate feelings and reactions, and agree to help when and where you think it is appropriate.

Slowly but surely, through an ongoing dialogue, the two of you are clarifying what you need, want, and hope for from each other. Slowly but surely a trusting, collaborative, helping relationship is established -- a pact is made.

And it becomes easier and easier to establish a good match for learning.

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Dialogues

"Boy, is my teacher dumb!"

"Why do you say that?

"She spends the whole day asking us questions."

We all know how to talk *to* children.

Talking with children is another matter.

"What's that you're doing?"

"Nothing."
(silence)

"Let's talk."

"O.K."
(silence)

"What's new?"

"Nothing."
(silence)

"How's your reading going?"

"O.K."

"What's the book about?"

"A horse."

"How far have you gotten?"

"About half-way."

"I'd like to talk to you about it when you've finished it."

"O.K."
(silence)

"Well, I'll talk to you later."

"O.K."

Three Guidelines to Think About When Talking With Children

- *Be comfortable doing things together with little or no conversation*
- *Talk about relevant things that interest you both*
- *Give and take openly and genuinely*

Is a Lot of Talk Necessary?

There's a story about a family with an eight year old boy who had never spoken.

One morning at the breakfast table they were quietly eating, as was their custom, when all of the sudden someone said, "How come my hot cereal is cold'?"

It took a second for the parents to realize the words had been uttered by their son.

Dumbfounded, they looked at him.

Finally, the mother stammered, "Y-Y-You spoke!"

"Certainly, " said the boy.

"But," asked his father, "why haven't you said anything before?"

"I didn't need to, everything's been fine up to now."

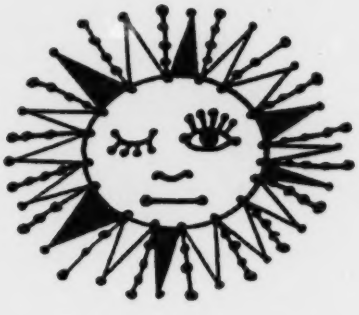
Some children are fond of talking a lot and often; others aren't. In helping children learn, it's important to be comfortable with them without pushing them to talk more than they want to.

Dialogues can go on without a lot of words.

Think about all the times you communicate without talking. Sometimes you just don't feel like talking or just don't have the right words or find that what you want to communicate is best said without words. It's the same for children -- often more so.

There are many times when you want to know what's going on in a child's head, but it is important to remember not to push. Invite the youngster to share. If she or he doesn't seem inclined to do so right now, let the youngster know that you don't mind.

Pressuring a youngster to talk can seriously interfere with the helping process. As long as you're in contact and communicating on some level, you can help a child learn. Sometimes a touch ... a smile ... a wink is better than a word.



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Mutually Interesting Talk

It's easy to ask questions. Too easy!

It's usually not so easy having to answer one question after another. And even if the questions are easy to answer, question and answer sessions do not a dialogue make. Questions can raise feelings of anxiety. It doesn't take too many before it feels like an interrogation. The child may see the questioner as prying or demanding. At the very least, answering adults' questions can be boring.

Giving a child more information than is wanted or relating long and involved directions can produce the same sort of effects. Worse yet, too many directions may convey the message "Do as I tell you; I'm in charge here!"

One key to mutually interesting talk is to look for shared interests. With regard to learning activities, discuss options and choices and ways to explore and enjoy the activities. Offer supportive comments and encourage suggestions.

And when the child talks, stop what you're doing and *listen.*

Listen attentively.

Listen not only to the words, but to the music – to feelings conveyed in the way the child is talking.

If the music is happy, you'll probably want to say so ("You sound very happy about that!"); if the sound is a sad one ("You seem a bit sad about that."). No question is necessary. You don't have to ask "Are you sad?" "Why are you sad?" Your comments often will be enough to start a dialogue about the youngster's feelings, *if the child wants to talk.*

There's a lot happening when two people are involved with each other in a helping relationship. There's plenty of interesting and relevant things to talk about.

"What's that you're doing?"

"Nothing."
(silence)

"Let's talk."

"O.K."
(silence)

"That math homework reminds me of work today."

"Oh yeah?"

"I had to figure out some prices during a meeting, and I got so nervous that I couldn't get it to come out right."

"Hey, that's what happened to me during my math quiz today"

"When something like that happens to me, I get very embarrassed and a little angry."

"Angry?"

"Yeah, angry at myself for choking up and angry at my boss for making me do it."

"What did you do?"

"I decided that next time I wouldn't hurry; I'd keep calm and not let it get to me."

"I wish it were that easy."

"If I can do it, so can you. Would you like to practice my new strategy on that homework you're doing? I'd be glad to help you."

"O.K. -- just for a few minutes though."

"Great. Take a deep breath and ask yourself: 'What is it I have to do in this problem."

"Aw, that sounds silly?"

"O.K. Just take a few breaths to get calm and then only think about the first step you have to do. Ready?

"Yeah, tell me what to do next while I copy out the problem."

OPENNESS AND GENUINESS

Remember that what you're trying to do is develop an ongoing, collaborative, trusting relationship. You want the youngster to feel good about asking for help. You want the youngster to feel like sharing feelings and thoughts with you -- positive and negative. You want the child to feel free to say "Thanks, that's enough for now."

To achieve all this, you will need to be open and genuine in carrying on the dialogue. And as Joubert has stated, keep in mind that "children have more need of models than of critics."

Openness and genuineness involve being willing to share your thoughts and feelings with the child. If you want him or her to share with you, you must be willing to share yourself.

Of course, this doesn't mean taking every opportunity to talk about what's on your mind.

Just as you often wonder what's going on in the youngsters head, there are times when she or he is wondering what you're thinking. This is one of the best times to share.

And a child may be both relieved and fascinated to hear that you've had similar experiences.

Share freely and in a way that you think *will help (not interfere with) the relationship.* This will show the youngster that it's all right for people to share what's on their minds and will provide a good model for how to do it.

Decisions

"I made a hundred decisions today --
all of them wrong!"

Sometimes helping a child learn is carefully planned; at other times helping occurs spontaneously in the natural course of events.

In either case, three major decisions must be made.

- **WHEN TO START**
- **WHEN TO STOP**
- **WHAT TO DO IN BETWEEN**

What is involved in making these decisions is pretty easy to understand.

What's hard is making the decisions appropriately.

Starting and Stopping

Not much good learning is going to take place if either the helper or the child is tired, upset, or preoccupied. Obviously, then, the time to start is when *both* parties are truly ready. The time to stop is when *either* no longer wants to continue.

That's easy to understand. But sometimes people push.

After a hard day at school, Jimmy Johnstone and his brother went out to play in front of their house. They brought a baseball along and eventually got around to throwing it back and forth. About that time, their father came home.

Mr. Johnstone is a man who very much wants his boys to be good athletes, and so he was quite pleased to see them playing baseball. It seemed to him a good time to teach them some skills.

After greeting them warmly, he started to show them "how it's done".

That was O.K. with the boys – for a while. But after 20 minutes of instruction, it was getting to be too much like what they had experienced all day at school. They were tired and ready to quit. But their father wasn't.

Mr. Johnstone knew there wouldn't be many chances for him to work with the boys on their throwing skills, and he didn't intend to lose this opportunity. So he pushed on.

As the boys' enthusiasm waned, they performed sluggishly and dropped the ball frequently. Soon Mr. Johnstone was upset: "What's the matter with you guys? You're not trying."

Finally, he got angry: "If that's the way you're going to be, I've got better things to do with my time".

With that, he stomped off into the house, and the boys were left feeling a bit inadequate and quite guilty. Mr. Johnstone had not only lost the opportunity to help the boys but had lost the chance to play with his sons and share the joy of the moment.

When you want to accomplish something, it's hard not to push. Helpers, children, or both often feel they have to push. Sometimes it's because what's involved is of special interest to them; sometimes it's because of a scheduled event -- tomorrow's homework assignment, next week's recital or game, or for college and a career.

Pushing is fine as long as both parties are ready and willing. Otherwise it's a problem.

- Learning occurs best when the learner is ready.
- Helping occurs best when the helper is ready.
- When either is not ready, helping can easily lead to disaster.

One youngster liked learning but found school a bit pressuring. There was just too much information coming at him too fast. But through it all he did not lose his sense of humor.

When asked to write about his favorite class, he quipped:

> ***My favorite class is biology. Biology is the study of the human body which has three parts. The head which holds the brains, if there is any. The chest which holds the heart, and the stummick, which holds the vowels which are a, e, i, o, u and sometimes y and w.***

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Parents and teachers often mistakenly think that just because a child is involved in an activity, the youngster will be receptive to help. A hard reality to accept is that, even when a child likes the activity and wishes that she or he could do well, the youngster may have little desire to work at it. We all wish for more than we are willing to strive for.

There are signs when this is the case.

Delaying tactics by the youngster:

"I'll do it later." or *"I've practiced that enough."*

Countertactics by parents:

"How do you expect to be good if you don't practice."

Blaming after the fact by the youngster:

"Why didn't you make me do it?"

Blaming after the fact by the parents:

"If you wanted to do better, you should have prepared better."

The push is not always from others: children often push for help and find others are not willing to provide it. This occurs when the child is asking at the wrong time or place. And, if a youngster seems to be pushing him or herself beyond endurance, parents may not want to help.

So sometimes you will find you want to help but the child doesn't want it, and sometimes the child will want help and you won't want to give it. In either case, helping shouldn't be started or if underway it should be stopped.

HELPING CHILDREN LEARN SHOULD ALWAYS BE A MUTUAL DECISION.

It is through ongoing dialogues that the desires and needs of the child and helper are identified and explored. It is through dialogues that agreements to start and continue are made. Without an ongoing dialogue, it is easy to make the mistake of pushing the child on when one should really stop or look for alternative ways of spending the time together.

When there is no ongoing dialogue and no mutual decision making, there is a good chance that well intentioned efforts to help will go down the drain.

WHAT TO DO BETWEEN STARTING AND STOPPING

Establishing a good match for learning takes a bit of doing. A good strategy in helping children learn is to follow their lead. The learning opportunities they identify as worthwhile provide the best potential for learning.

For the most part, children tend to want to explore and learn from what is around them. At times, however, you may find the youngster's interests too costly -- financially or in time and effort. And we all know about fads -- things that must be had no matter the cost and then are used only once or twice before they are forgotten.

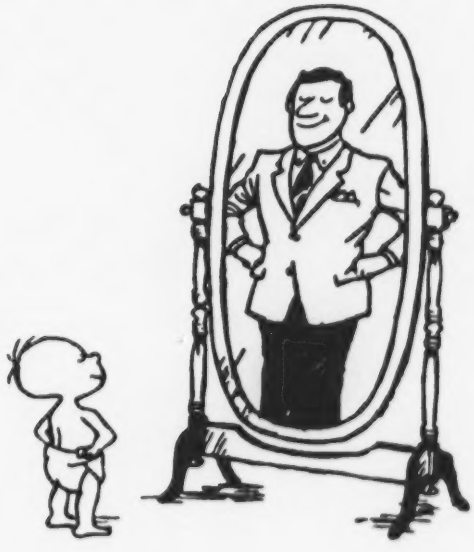
However, before ruling out any potentially good learning opportunity, a youngster's suggestions should be explored fully. Opportunities that are extremely important to a youngster need to be given a great deal of consideration. Again, dialogues provide a way not only to explore but to sample proposed learning opportunities.

Children can participate not only in deciding what to do but also in getting ready to carry out decisions. The "costs" to the helper can be cut to the degree that a youngster shares the load.

Despite your best efforts, there will be times when the child's lead just cannot be followed. When this is the case, mutually acceptable compromises must be made. We will discuss a process for handling this when we explore problem solving a little later.

REMEMBER: YOUR ROLE AS A HELPER IS NOT TO DO THINGS FOR THE YOUNGSTER BUT TO DO THINGS *WITH* THE YOUNGSTER.

> *"My father used to help me with math. But since I started geometry, he decided I'd get a lot more out of it if I did it myself."*



In helping children learn, there are two guidelines for decision making about what to do in between starting and stopping.

Within the limits of each person's resources,

- **make decisions about learning opportunities together;**
- **develop learning opportunities through mutual effort.**

There are many potential benefits to be gained by following these guidelines.

For one, children who participate in decisions and in efforts related to carrying out decisions usually are quite committed to following through with learning opportunities.

For another, children not only will learn from the chosen activities, they also will learn what is involved in making good choices and will have experiences that can help them grow into more independent and competent decision makers.

Dilemmas

"What's easy to get into, but hard to get out of?"

"Trouble."

Dilemmas arise when there is a bad match for learning.

They may arise because of poor readiness on the part of the child.

Or they may result from poor learning opportunities (including poor readiness on the part of the helper).

Whatever their cause, all helping dilemmas boil down to one fundamental conflict--*to push or not to push*?

When learning isn't going smoothly, do you risk making things worse by pushing on?

OR

Do you stop and risk the possibility that the child will miss out on the learning opportunities at hand?

TO PUSH OR NOT TO PUSH

If you push, you worry that you will create negative attitudes toward the area of learning. If you push in enough areas, you risk creating negative attitudes toward learning in general and perhaps toward you and anyone else who wants to help the child learn.

If you let it go, the particular learning opportunity is missed. If you always let it go, a whole area of learning may not be developed. Also, there is the worry that "giving up" may become a habit.

Jenny's parents decided to give her swimming lessons when she was five. The first day in the pool was a disaster. She swallowed some water, gagged, panicked, and threw up. Everyone tried to reassure her that it would be O.K. next time, but she was determined there would never be a next time.

Her mother felt it would be best to drop swimming for now. Her father said it was essential that she not back away in fear. "It's like falling off a bike when you first learn to ride," he said; "she has to get right back at it or else she'll always be afraid and perhaps never learn."

"But," his wife reminded him, "we let her stop when she got hurt at her ice skating lessons and didn't want to go anymore, and she went back later."

"That was different, ice skating you can take or leave -- knowing how to swim could save her life some day."

Reading was Debbie's problem. She just couldn't keep up at school. Her parents were naturally very worried and tried to help her at home. But every time they tried, she got nervous and agitated.

When they consulted the teacher, she explained that children often have trouble working with their parents on school problems.

She recommended they consider a tutor.

After a couple of tutoring sessions, Debbie said she hated it and did not want to go back. Her parents explained that reading was one of the most important things she was going to learn, and she could not afford to ignore her problems in this area. They insisted she continue with the tutoring. She said they'd have to drag her there, and despite her kicking and screaming, they did.

Think about what you would do in these circumstances.

THERE IS NO GOOD SOLUTION TO A DILEMMA. WHATEVER IS DONE INVOLVES SOME RISK. THE BEST SOLUTION IS ONE THAT MINIMIZES THE RISKS AND HARM INVOLVED -- HOPEFULLY BOTH IN THE SHORT- AND LONG-RUN.

NOT PUSHING

It is comforting to realize that very few missed learning opportunities are lost forever. In the long-run, children can afford to back away from many experiences and return to them later.

Indeed, if they are really not ready to undertake an experience, often the best thing to do is move on to something else for now. The time can be spent on learning something that is equally valuable in the long-run.

Sometimes you can avert having to push by the way you discuss matters. It is unlikely you will convince many children to do something they are determined not to do. But it may be possible to help a youngster reevaluate the situation.

To do so, you must stop pushing and again get set to help.

This means picking up the dialogue and helping the youngster explore the decision to back away.

Remember, however, that before anything can be explored, the youngster probably needs some help just to calm down. ("I know all this has been upsetting. Let's take a break and do something to relax. What sounds good to you?")

And before discussing anything else, children may show they need to talk about how upsetting the experience was and why.

You will want to empathize with the feelings without getting involved in judgments about who was at fault. ("It really did scare you." or "It really made you angry." not "If you hadn't panicked, you wouldn't have had so much trouble.")

Then, it's time to move into some problem-solving. ("Let's take a little time to look at what's wrong and what might be some ways to make things better.")

Conflicts about homework are all too common.

Tom became quite concerned when his relationship with his teenage daughter started to disintegrate because of their frequent battles over her homework. He had always helped her with her homework and liked to do so. She had always appreciated his help.

But it seemed to him that lately she was watching too much television and leaving her homework for the last minute before bedtime. By the time she asked for help, it was taking them well past her bedtime to get the work done.

Tom: (angrily) "Why don't you get started sooner?"

Lesley: (whining) "I didn't think there was so much to do."

Tom: (with increasing irritation) "You need to watch less TV and spend more time on your schoolwork."

Lesley: (crying) "If you don't want to help, let's just stop. I'll get the answers from someone at school tomorrow."

Tom: (feeling guilty and resentful) "Let's just figure out the answers and get it done. But next time let's start earlier."

But next time was pretty much the same routine. Tom had a real dilemma on his hands. He didn't want to hurt his relationship with Lesley, but he also didn't want her to be irresponsible about her school work.

Finally, he realized that he needed to sit down with Lesley and talk about his dilemma. He asked her to save some time for him on Saturday so that they could talk about the matter.

Together, they agreed that their relationship and getting school work done were both important. However, they also recognized that while the relationship was their joint responsibility, the homework was primarily Lesley's responsibility. Tom indicated he was willing to help, but only if he was asked at least two hours before bedtime. Lesley readily agreed. In turn, she asked that he try not to get so upset with her when she was having trouble with a homework problem. He readily agreed. They hugged and laughed about how hard schoolwork was on both of them.

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Before I had children, I had 2 theories about child rearing.
Now I have 2 children and no theories.

PUSHING

Do you think that Jenny should be made to go back to her swimming lessons? Debbie to the tutor?

We all consider pushing whenever we are *very* convinced that the youngster will suffer quite a bit more from backing away than from being pushed on. At such times, we feel compelled to take responsibility for deciding what is in the child's best long-term interests.

When might such times arise?

Usually, these are occasions when life-shaping matters are at stake, and any delay in acting may cause serious harm – now or later. Jenny's father is worried that the one bad experience will make his daughter so afraid of the water that she will avoid learning to swim and one day may drown. ("A few tears now is a small price to pay for saving her life!") Similarly, Debbie's parents know how important reading is and are certain that if she does not have tutoring now, she will have major problems throughout her schooling.

Picture a scene from your childhood when someone made you learn something you didn't want to learn.

Perhaps it was piano lessons or memorizing definitions of words or (fill in your own unfavored experience).

Why did they make you do it? How did you react? In what ways do you think the situation should have been handled differently?

There may also have been times when you were trying to and wanted to learn something on your own, but someone decided you should be helped. Parents and teachers often move in to help in some situations only to find a youngster who resents the interference. ("Mother, I'd rather do it myself") Adults are often surprised, angry, and hurt by such "ungrateful" and hostile reactions. ("After all I've done for her, how could she treat me like that?")

Student to friend:

*"The human brain is amazing. **Mine produces the most fantastic ideas***

--

until the teacher calls on me in class.

From the perspective of helping children learn, pushing and helping usually are not compatible, and so forcing a child is done only with great reluctance.

Before trying to force learning, ask yourself:

"How much immediate harm will there be if this isn't learned now?"

"Will there be other opportunities for learning this?"

"How much is it likely to harm the youngster and our relationship--now and in the long-run -- if I push?"

Then, weigh in your mind which course of action is likely to produce the least harm and take it. (Be careful not to let your feelings of fear and anger cloud your judgment.)

*And if you decide you must push -- **do it gently and with a lot of caring.***

Remember, the child is upset (scared, frustrated, angry), just as you may be.

This is the stuff interpersonal conflicts are made of. The last thing either of you need at a time like this is to fight with each other. You probably will have to be firm, but what is called for is a velvet glove not an iron fist.

Push only when

- the matter at hand is extremely important -- a major life consideration, and

- the potential harm of pushing does not outweigh the potential harm of not pushing.

The principal was pulling a piece of string down the hall toward a classroom.

"How come you're pulling that string?" he was asked.

"Well," he replied, " have you ever tried pushing a piece of string?"

The decision to push is a decision to shift your role from that of helping to that of socialization. Obviously, such decisions are made without the child's voluntary consent. If handled gently, however, the amount of harm and resistance can be lessened.

- **What is needed first is a note of empathy -- recognizing with the youngster that the experience is upsetting.**
- **Also try a brief explanation about why this is one of those rare times when there can be no backing away.**
- **If at all possible, involve the youngster in identifying ways to make the situation more tolerable.**
- **Then, provide appropriate support during the experience and some tender loving care afterwards.**

Over time, you will recognize that when there is a lot of pushing in "the child's best interest," something probably is wrong. Either the helper is seeing too many things as essential, or something is not right in terms of the child's motivation and/or developmental readiness.

Should you find yourself having to do a great deal of pushing, think about it for a while, and explore the dilemma with the youngster.

If you're still uncertain about what to do, it's one of those times when you need some help to figure things out.

If you don't have to push, don't!

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Learning Experiences

There are books and books describing learning activities. There is a staggering number of packaged and published materials and programs. Some stress the development or remediation of basic skills – reading, writing, arithmetic. Others stress enrichment opportunities involving discovery, inquiry, and serendipity. Many of them are useful, and you'll want to look some over along the way.

Right now, think in terms of what is involved in creating good learning opportunities for a child.

In keeping with the ideas of establishing a good match and a pact for learning, it's important to

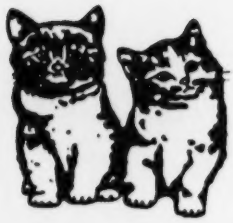
- Offer options that are likely to be valued, and
- Introduce these opportunities in vivid ways.

VALUED OPTIONS

Options mean choices --- real choices. Having several different books to choose from is not much of a choice if the child has not yet developed an interest in reading books. Real choices come from having opinions that reflect the child's current interests and abilities. A wide range of possibilities can easily be identified.

- Published lists of popular topics and activities represent one good way to find learning opportunities a child might value.
- Other ways to identify valued options involve watching for what arouses the youngster's curiosity and exploring personal interests whenever the child is willing to discuss them.
- And, of course, there are options you think are particularly important and worthwhile which you will want to introduce.

On the next page is a list of topics and activities we have found to be popular options among young learners.



Popular Options

Animals
care, training, and breeding; incubating chickens; learning about prehistoric and exotic animals

Arts & Crafts
drawing, painting, and constructing; hobbies; gardening; exploring others' work

Career & Vocation
observing and participating in work settings; learning about money

Computers
basic uses, graphics, language, logic, and games

Consumer activity
shopping and comparing prices; learning about advertising gimmicks

Cooking to eat and sell
from cookies to lemonade stands

Creative Writing
stories, plays, poetry

Cultures and other peoples
comparing the way one lives with the lives of others-- rituals, beliefs, music, food, art, dress, education

Design
graphics, construction, drafting, architecture

Drama
acting and staging performances; assuming a critics' role when watching TV, movies, or stage productions; learning more about favorite people and current trends in the popular culture

Friends, family, role-models
doing almost anything (sports, games, hobbies) with others one likes and admires.

History

specific past events -- invention of the automobile, space exploration, a particular war; current events

Motors and transportation

almost everything related to any vehicle with a motor

Music

playing an instrument, singing, and composing; learning more about popular personalities and trends

Photography

operating a camera; darkroom skills; composing pictures and creating special effects; displaying products.

Puzzles

magic tricks; number and graph puzzles; jig saw; crossword; tricks with mathematics

Psychology in everyday situations

exploring one's immediate environment to discover how others think and feel; why individuals and groups behave as they do

Reading

anything that has words

Science

anything that is encountered in everyday life --- electricity and magnets, chemical reactions, health care and medicine, the stars

Space

constructing and flying rockets; space travel

Sports

almost anything to do with team sports, games, and recreational activities -- skills and strategies, history, past and current personalities

Travel

from around the neighborhood to around the world -- planning and taking trips on foot, by car, bus, train, or plane; learning about travel aides and skills such as map reading

Video

as access to video recorders increases, so does interest in using them to produce and create shows -- learning may involve writing scripts, directing, camerawork, editing, acting.

A learning opportunity may be briefly pursued or may become a long-term project or hobby. The youngster may want to learn specific things or may just set out on a voyage of discovery. And one thing may lead to another. An interest in science can lead to an increased desire to read better; an interest in cooking or photography can lead a youngster to recognize a need for basic addition and subtraction skills; an interest in travel often leads to an interest in other people, their cultures, and their history.

One day Sally saw some goldfish in a store. She was fascinated with the little creatures and wanted to know more about them. Where do they come from? How long do they live? How do they reproduce? Are they expensive?

As soon as she got the chance, she asked her mother and father about these matters. Since neither knew much about fish, they offered to take her back to the store on Saturday to see what they could learn.

The store owner was only too happy to answer Sally's question. He also showed her some small, picture-filled books and told her there were a lot of other good books available on fish of all kinds.

Sally was enthralled. Since the goldfish were not expensive, she asked her parents if she could buy two with her allowance. They thought it would be fine and even contributed by buying a small fish bowl.

Not long after, Sally asked to be taken to the library to find a couple good books on fish. The librarian helped her find several picture books written for children --- including an exquisite one on tropical fish.

Over the next few days, Sally pored over the books. She could not read much of the printed commentary, but the picture told her a lot. Occasionally, she asked her parents to read sections to help her find answers to her question, and soon she was asking them to teach her specific words so that she could read the captions under the pictures by herself.

Not all activities, of course are meant to be vehicles for learning. Some primarily provide ways to practice what has been learned. Here too, options are important to keep a child's interest high.

Besides activity options, there also should be choices when it comes to the help that is offered. There are times when a child really wants to pursue an activity without anyone around. Other times a great deal or just a little help may be wanted. And, while almost anyone can help, a youngster may have a strong preference about who can help best.

By establishing a variety of appropriate options, the chances are increased that a child will find learning and practice activities to be enjoyable or at least worthwhile and satisfying.

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Jill noticed that each day Jack brought two sandwiches for lunch — one was peanut butter and the other bologna --- but he always ate the peanut butter sandwich and threw the other away.

Finally, she could ignore it no longer.

"How come you always throw one of your sandwiches away?"

"I don't like bologna."

"How come you bring it in your lunch then?"

"Well if I didn't, I wouldn't have a choice would I?"

Remember: in stressing the importance of providing options and choices, we are not proposing overindulgence. Not only is it unnecessary to take on all the "costs" involved, it is a mistake to do so.

Your role is to assist --- not do things for the child.

Most youngsters are able to find a variety of good learning opportunities in the world around them. And they can create many others. When they want help identifying new and interesting options, establishing good activities can be a shared enterprise. Much is to be gained by having children participate in the evolution of learning activities.

Any experience can be a learning activity .....

..... and every learning activity can be an experience!

Vivid Opportunities

A vivid learning opportunity is one that catches a youngster's attention. Parents and teachers know that such opportunities often have to knock more than once.

THE CONCERN HERE IS

- how to have new opportunities noticed, and
- how to have ongoing opportunities maintain their attractiveness.

FOR THE MOST PART,

things that are new and novel attract attention --- as long as they are not so far removed from the child's past experiences as to be meaningless;

things that have ben anticipated are noticed when they arrive;

things that are valued are awaited expectantly;

things that others seem interested in can have a special attractiveness.

IN CONTRAST,

things that one is pushed toward often are seen as something to be avoided.

Some new opportunities are inherently attractive. You only have to bring an animal or a computer or a game into the room, and most youngsters can't wait to get their hands on it. Other opportunities need to be introduced in special ways or they won't be appreciated; they may have to be presented at a time and place when the youngster can sample them or can observe other enjoying them.

Such introductions become part of the ongoing dialogue with the child. Obviously, this is a time when the dialogue expands beyond talk. The youngster is encouraged and helped to explore options and make choices.

After a while most things become old hat. Books and games, once treasured, languish on dusty shelves. New hobbies replace old ones. Arguments about who gets to use the new computer fade away, and the machine goes almost unused. The excitement of learning to play a musical instrument becomes blunted and daily practice sessions become a source of irritation.

For learning opportunities to maintain their attractiveness, there is a need for constant renewal. Two guidelines for renewal are to plan for recycling and for changes in routines.

Recycling --- When they no longer attract attention, dust catchers can be removed from view and reintroduced later. Thus, some new learning options may simply be familiar things that are recycled. Children often are ecstatic upon rediscovering something they used to do. It can be like meeting an old friend.

Changes in routines --- When a child's interest in something wanes, it may simply be time to stop the activity. However, this may not be desirable -- as in the case of practice sessions related to the gradual development of complex skills (learning to read, play a musical instrument, or develop athletic skills). Assuming the youngster really wants the skills, the need here is to plan for ways to keep practice sessions from becoming tedious routines. This can be done by exploring and planning with the child a variety of practice alternatives and to identify a range which she or he sees as worthwhile and satisfying.

VARIETY IS INDEED THE SPICE OF LIFE.

Variety in learning opportunities and practice activities is an important ingredient in enriching and preventing and correcting learning problems.

52

Problem Solving

Once there was a man who could think of no other way to solve his problem

so he climbed to the top of a skyscraper and jumped.

On the way down, he pondered the wisdom of his solution.

As he passed a third floor window he was heard to mutter: "Well so far so good."

Everyone is painfully aware that problems can arise in trying to help children learn.

The more you can accept the fact that problem-solving is a natural part of helping children learn, the less you may feel upset when problems occur. Fortunately, fewer problems arise in helping than in training children. And fewer still are very serious.

The two most common child-related problems are

- ***Negative attitudes toward being helped, and***
- ***poor learning abilities.***

If you are especially interested in these problems, some perspectives on them are discussed in the added note at the end of this guide.

The ideas you've read about in the preceding pages provide the foundation for dealing with these problems. But the more complex the problem, the more you will have to do some experimenting or problem-solving. Here, too, the more the youngster is an active participant in problem-solving, the better.

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Problem-solving involves both a way of THINKING and a series of STEPS.

THINKING LIKE A PROBLEM SOLVER

Look at the nine dots below.

Think Like A Problem Solver

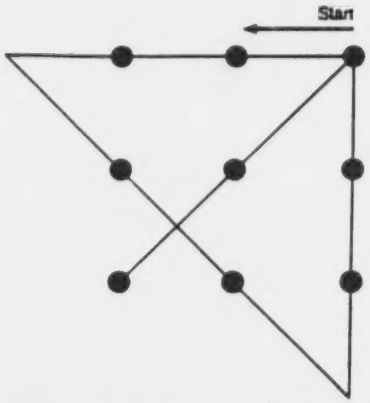
Look at the nine dots below.

The difficulty in solving this problem comes from the tendency most people have to keep within what seems to be a square "box" created by the nine dots. This is a problem for you to solve. The problem is to connect all nine dots with four straight, connecting lines, without removing your pencil from the page or retracing any line.

Most people do not solve this problem when they first encounter it. We sure didn't!

If you need it, the answer is on the next page.

This is the solution to the puzzle.



To solve the problem, a person has to "see" beyond the dots— to get out of the box. The problem has to be thought about in a different way. And usually the person has to stop repeating strategies that aren't working.

When problems arise in helping a child learn, it is time to expand your thinking and be quick to give up routines that don't work.

We all develop ways we prefer to use in helping others. If it worked before, we usually want to use it again.

But problem-solving calls for us to quickly identify and give up any routine that isn't working . Once freed from our old way of thinking, we must fill the void. At times, you will fill it through your own creativity; other times you will find new ideas by looking to others for help.

The important thing is that you are thinking like a problem solver rather than letting yourself get trapped in a box.

There's always an easy solution to every human problem --- neat, plausible and wrong.

H.L. Mencken

PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS IN HELPING

You can think about the steps of problem solving as follows:

- **Understand the problem**
- **List possible solutions**
- **Weigh pros and cons and decide which to try**
- **Try the solution**
- **If it doesn't work, figure out why and start again**

The first step in problem solving is to understand the problem.

Mr. Johnstone wanted to help his boys learn how to throw a baseball correctly. But during his lesson, the boys' performed poorly.

Why?

Their father saw the problem as caused by his sons' "lack of trying". The boys saw themselves as simply being too tired to go on. We see the problem as reflecting both a poor match for learning and the lack of an appropriate pact for helping.

There are often different views about what caused a problem. It is important not to jump too quickly to conclusion about which view is right.

As you learn more about what causes such problems and have dialogue with the youngster about what's going on, you will find yourself testing out several possible ideas about the nature of the problem.

How the problem is understood shapes the list of **possible solutions** considered. If you and the child agree about the nature of the problem, solutions will reflect that agreement. If you don't agree, it means arriving at a compromise such as considering possible solutions to fit both viewpoints.

For the Johnstones, one reasonable compromise might be to have a short instruction session and then play for a while. Another compromise would be to agree to stop when the boys got tired and plan another time for playing and learning.

Weighing pros and cons involves considering cost of each possible solution --- potential benefits, personal preferences, time, effort, money risk and potential harm. The process ends with a mutual decision about which one to try.

After considering the pros and cons of different times and how much time the boys really wanted to spend with instruction, it was decided that Saturday was a mutually convenient time when 15 minutes could be devoted to lessons. Then some additional time would be available for Mr. Johnstone to spend just playing with his sons.

As **you try the solution**, think in terms of a helping stance. You want to proceed in ways that mobilize the youngster's efforts to work with you toward an effective solution.

> ***After discussing the boys' view of the pros and cons of the Saturday sessions, Mr. Johnstone was aware they might get tired or bored. Therefore, in planning, he and the boys worked out some practice games, and whenever he thought their attention was starting to wander, he changed the activity.***

If it doesn't work, review what you have done so far. In effect, you use additional experience as new information, **and** you **start** the problem-solving sequence **again**. The **new information** may change understanding of the nature of the problem or suggest additional possible solution . It may also influence how you weigh the pros and cons, and how the next solution is tried.

Once upon a time three scholarly turtles who lived by a country lake decided to go to the city to study the habits of people. They packed a picnic lunch and set out.

About an hour from home, they realized they had forgotten their binoculars. After some discussion, it was decided that Trudy, who was the youngest and fastest, should go back and get them. Trudy, who loved to eat, agreed only after the other two promised not to eat any of the picnic lunch until she got back.

An hour went by, then two, then six. Finally, the other two got too hungry to wait any longer.

"Come on, let's eat," they agreed.

All of a sudden up popped Trudy from behind a rock:

"If you do, " she said, "I'm not going!"

Moral: Without trust, problems are rarely solved and many a learning opportunity is lost.

There usually are different viewpoints about possible solutions, pros and cons, and which solution to try first. One of the most powerful things you can do in mobilizing the youngster's efforts to solve problems is to weigh more heavily the child's view in making necessary compromises when there are differences in opinion.

Problems can seem overwhelming. Therefore, good problem solvers suggest the value of "thinking small". By keeping a sense of proportion about a problem, there usually is some aspect of it that can be solved. A small but significant solution can be just the type of hope-inspiring event that makes a big difference in subsequent problem-solving and in learning and helping in general.

Finally, by problem-solving *with* youngsters, you can help them learn how to problem-solve on their own. This is an important step in preventing a child from growing too dependent on others for help.

Problems we encounter in helping children learn are not to be viewed as signs of failure. They are interesting developments from which we learn.

Feeling Good About Helping

How much you helped me
You'll never know.
You helped me learn
And you helped me grow.

Today I'm someone
Thanks to you.
And I'm helping others
Become someone too.

We don't help others just to make ourselves feel good. But that's no reason not to feel good when we help. Feeling good about oneself may be an essential ingredient in being an effective helper.

If you don't feel good about helping children learn, you're likely to stop doing it.

And perhaps you should.

Most of the time it feels extremely good to help a child learn. It's hard not to feel good when you see a youngster get hold of an elusive idea, understand the power of a concept, create instead of imitate. And, if the youngster shows appreciation for the role you have played, that's icing on the cake.

But, if you *must* have immediate, major, positive outcomes and appreciations in order to feel satisfied as a helper, you may soon find yourself frustrated and burned out. Frustration and burn out are all-too-common experiences among parents and teachers.

Helping is a process. It is a process that strives to produce good outcomes. It does not always succeed in doing so. You do not want to make the mistake of having your sense of worth and well-being too dependent on immediate and large-scale success.

It is not how often specific outcomes are achieved, but how you play your role that counts. If you do it right, you will have your share of good outcomes over the long-run. And there is no question about the fact that such outcomes will be particularly satisfying.

But your day-by-day satisfaction must come from "doing it right" – knowing that you have proceeded in ways that minimize the likelihood that you are doing harm and that maximizes the chances that your efforts will pay good dividends somewhere along the way for the youngster you help.

How do you know if you're doing it right?

- You feel ready, set, and rarin´ to go.
- You are able to develop an ongoing dialogue with the child.
- Decisions are made mutually with the child.
- You´re not pushing.
- There is a variety of accessible, valued and vivid learning opportunities.
- Problems are approached with expanded thinking, quick elimination of routines that aren´t working, and the use of problem solving steps.
- You´re learning from your efforts how to do it even better.

Seize this very minute;
What you can do or dream
you can do, begin it;
Boldness has genius, power
and magic in it.
Only engage and then the
mind grows heated;
Begin and the work will be completed.

Goethe

We are confronted with insurmountable opportunities.

-Pogo

AN ADDED NOTE ON:

UNDERSTANDING LEARNING PROBLEMS

Teacher: *What is the shape of the world?*

Jimmy: Terrible.

Frustration is a common feeling when helping and learning don't go smoothly. The frustration can lead any of us to conclude that something must be wrong with the child being helped.

After all, we demonstrated, explained, and presented the material clearly; Jimmy should have got it.

Why didn't he?

We are likely to conclude that it was either a lack of effort ("He would have learned if he'd really been trying.") or a lack of ability ("He'd have learned if he was smarter or not handicapped by a learning disabiiity.").

The frustration surrounding learning problems is more than understandable. But we all should be a bit more careful about jumping to quick conclusions about why a particular child is not learning.

It is obviously true that in some cases a child may not be trying hard enough. Usually, this occurs when the youngster is not very interested in what is being taught.

It is also true that some learning problems are due to lack of capability. Sometimes the deficiency is so great that a particular child can't adequately function in most learning situations. Such individuals clearly have a handicapping disability -- perhaps a neurological dysfunction.

However, such handicapping conditions are not as common as many people think. Actually, learning disabilities (a subgroup of learning problems caused by minimal brain dysfunction) are relatively rare. And many youngsters who have been labeled as learning disabled or learning handicapped, as well as some identified as emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, and so forth have been misdiagnosed. That is, their learning problems stem from other causes -- not internal handicapping conditions.

Some children simply have the misfortune of finding themselves in an environment which is so demanding or deficient that almost anyone might have trouble doing well in such a situation.

Think about trying to learn calculus from a teacher who hates math, has never been taught how to teach it, and who is angry because she has been assigned to teach it against her will.

For other youngsters, learning problems result from a combination of their own and the environment's lack of readiness.

Think about a course where you weren't particularly interested in the topic or didn't have the necessary background and the instructor wasn't very well organized or particularly interested in teaching the class.

It is very common for children just beginning school to vary tremendously in their degree of biological and social maturation. Five and six year olds who are maturing more slowly than their peers are likely to find that school programs cannot wait for them to catch up.

If Amy has not yet developed the perceptual capabilities to discriminate *b* from *d*, chances are she won't be able to handle reading readiness lessons at *the expected time.* As the teacher moves on to teach the next lesson, Amy falls further and further behind.

A year of so later, Amy has matured to the point where she can make the necessary perceptual discriminations easily. Unfortunately, she missed the opportunity to learn important basic skills. Her ongoing learning problems are not due to a handicapping condition but to the fact that she missed out on learning certain necessary prerequisites for later learning.

Whenever a learner and a learning environment mesh well together (when there is a good match between them), learning problems are unlikely to arise. When there is a bad match, it should not be surprising if people have trouble learning.

Whatever the cause of a child's learning problem, the ideas for helping the youngster learn remain pretty much the same. There are just a few additional matters to consider.

- Truly disabled individuals often have to learn how to compensate for areas affected by their handicaps.
- Persons who have had too many bad experiences in learning situations generally need to overcome low motivation and negative attitudes toward learning and help.
- And, low motivation and negative attitudes can lead to misbehavior in order to avoid painful or embarrassing experiences; thus, interfering behavior problems frequently have to be addressed.

The Solution for both behavior and learning problems usually involves letting the individual back away from stressful learning situations while providing opportunities for him or her to pursue personally valued learning activities. Then, without pushing, efforts are made to establish an ongoing helping relationship as described in the preceding pages.

When learning problems are very severe, a great deal of problem-solving activity is necessary. Because of the time, effort, and frustration-tolerance needed in such cases, special help may be required. But there is no magical solution

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Most learning problems are overcome as the result of a special commitment on the part of both the learner and the helper. Progress is sometimes slower than either person likes, but substantial gains can be made over time. As someone once said, *"The road to success runs uphill, so don't expect to break any speed records."*

And if we all paid just a bit more attention to how we help young children learn, many learning problems would never arise.

The surprised principal beamed as she waved the scores at Ms. Smith, the second grade teacher.

"How did you get these low IQ students to do so well?"

"Low IQ?" she repeated. "What do you mean low IQ?"

"Well, didn't you see their IQ scores on the list I sent you last fall?"

"Oh!" Ms. Smith exclaimed, "I thought those were their locker numbers!"

. . . . PREVENTION IS STILL THE BEST CURE!

Part II:

Basic Resources Professionals Can Draw on to Help Parents and Other Nonprofessionals Enhance Children's Learning and Performance

- internet and agency/organization resources
- a few selected references

Internet Sites

- **Family Involvement Partnership for Learning**
  http://www.ed.gov/PFIE/index.html
  Department of Education's online resource on creating school0home partnerships.

- **Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools**
  http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachFam/ is a government booklet, which presents accumulated knowledge and fresh ideas on school outreach strategies.

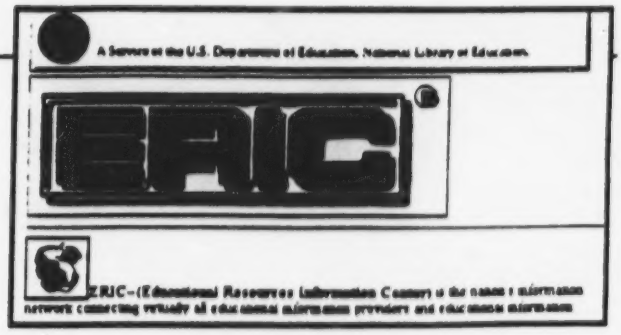
- **National Parent Information Network (NPIN)**
  Http://www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin.npinhome.html
  The prupose of NPIN is to provide information to parents and those who wrok with parents and to foster the exchange of parenting materials, numerous great links here including to Parents AskERIC.

- **Urban/Minority Families**
  http://www.eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/
  Links to publications, digests, and parent guides relevant to parent, school, and community collaborations which support diverse learners in urban settings.

- **Connecting the Home, School, and Community**
  http://www.sedl.org:80/hscp/welcome.html
  This page developed and maintained by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Provides downloadable guidebooks for bringing educators, parents, and the community together to forge onging, comprehensive collaborations.

- **Children First: The Website of the National PTA**
  http://www.pta.org/issues/ldwk117-18.htm
  The National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer association in the United States working exclusively on behalf of children and youth. The PTA is created to support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children; to assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children; and to encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation. The website allows you to get information on annual conventions, periodical subscriptions, updates on legislative activity, PTA membership, links to other PTAs and children advocacy groups, as well as chats, bulletin boards, and more.

Online With ERIC



One of the great things about cyberspace is that the people who run the various sites create links with other sites, allowing you to go beyond the Gopher site or World Wide Web (WWW) page you start with. We hope you'll visit the following ERIC sites both for their own offerings and for the gateways they provide to other education resources.

AskERIC

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology at Syracuse University manages AskERIC, an Internet-based service that provides a full range of education information to teacher educators, teachers, students, librarians, counselors, administrators, parents, and others. AskERIC offers:

- A question-answering service,
- The AskERIC Virtual Library, and
- Internet access to the ERIC database.

If you have an education-related question, send it via e-mail to **askeric@ericir.syr.edu**. You'll receive an e-mail response in approximately 48 hours. Depending on the nature of your question, you might receive the full text of one or more research summaries called ERIC Digests, the results of a short ERIC database search, or the addresses of relevant Internet Gopher sites and listservs.

Through the AskERIC Virtual Library, you can find InfoGuides and database searches on key education topics; the full text of lesson plans, research summaries, and other resources; and gateways to other education-related Internet sites. To use the AskERIC Virtual Library, gopher or telnet to **ericir.syr.edu**. If you have Lynx, Mosaic, or another WWW browser, open the URL and connect to **http://ericir.syr.edu**.

AskERIC also provides public access to the ERIC database with search capability. The URL is **http://ericir.syr.edu/ERIC/eric.html**. You can also telnet to **ericir.syr.edu**. Log in as "Gopher," hit Return/Enter for the password, then follow the instructions.

National Parent Information Network

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign has created a WWW server on the Internet specifically devoted to child development, care, and education, and the parenting of children from birth through early adolescence. This National Parent Information Network (NPIN), cosponsored by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education at Columbia University, includes:

- Short articles from groups such as the National Urban League, the National PTA, and the Center for Early Adolescence;
- Discussion groups and forums on early childhood topics; and
- Parents AskERIC, a question-answering service for parents that taps the resources of the federally funded ERIC system.

To access NPIN, gopher to **ericps.ed.uiuc.edu**. If you have WWW access, open the URL and connect to **http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html**. If you have e-mail capabilities, you can send your questions about early childhood and elementary topics to Parents AskERIC at **askeece@uiuc.edu**.

Other ERIC Gopher/WWW Sites

All ERIC components have e-mail addresses (listed on the inside back cover) for routine correspondence. The following components also offer online services:

ACCESS ERIC (for general information about the ERIC system and links to all other ERIC sites)
Gopher: aspensys.aspensys.com, Education and Training Division
URL: http://www.aspensys.com/eric2/welcome.html

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for Art Education
URL: http://www.indiana.edu/~ssdc/art.html

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for Child Care
URL: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/nccic/nccichome.html

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NPIN
National Parent Information Network

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
Clearinghouse on Urban Education

Welcome to the National Parent Information Network

- About the National Parent Information Network
- Parent News (Updated Monthly)
- Urban/Minority Families
- Parents AskERIC
- PARENTING Discussion List
- Resources for Parents
- Resources for Those Who Work with Parents
- ERIC Information and Materials
- Internet Resources for Parents and Those Who Work with Parents

NPIN has Been Rated in The Top 5% of All Websites by Point Communications

NPIN
National Parent Information Network

What Is the National Parent Information Network?

The **National Parent Information Network (NPIN)** is a project sponsored by two ERIC clearinghouses: the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City; and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; all other ERIC system components are also contributors and participants. Collaborating organizations, which provide information resources and promote use of the NPIN among their constituencies, include the National Urban League and the Illinois Parent Initiative, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, the National PTA, and the Family Literacy Center at Indiana University.

The purpose of NPIN is to provide information and communications capabilities to parents and those who work with parents. Materials included full text here have been reviewed by persons outside the ERIC system for reliability and usefulness. Publications, brochures, and other materials that are merely listed here have not been reviewed and are included for informational purposes only.

How You Can Be Part of NPIN

If you are a parent, you are already part of NPIN! Enjoy the information in the **Resources for Parents** section, try out the **Parents AskERIC** question-answering service, and let other parents know about the resources here. If you have suggestions about features we might add, topics that you wish you could find information on, or improvements we might make in NPIN, please let us know by calling, writing to, or e-mailing to one of the toll-free telephone numbers, postal addresses, or e-mail addresses listed below.

If you are a parent educator or someone else who works with parents, we welcome your suggestions and comments, too, contact us using our 800 numbers, postal addresses, or e-mail addresses. If you know of another site that would benefit from using the National Parent Information Network, please call and discuss it with us, or have someone at that site get in touch with us.

For More Information

The National Parent Information Network is currently seeking funding from foundations, corporations, and other sources to expand its services. A 2-page Prospectus for the project and other information on the NPIN is available by contacting either of the ERIC Clearinghouses listed below.

Dianne Rothenberg
ERIC/EECE

Urban/Minority Families

This section of **UEweb** is a part of the National Parent Information Network

Special Publications

Guest publications about issues important to urban and minority families.

- **School-Linked Comprehensive Services for Children and Families: What We Know and What We Need to Know**. This 125-page book identifies a research and practice agenda on school-linked, comprehensive services for children and families created by a meeting of researchers/evaluators, service providers, family members and representatives from other Federal agencies. It summarizes the proceedings from a 1994 conference sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and the American Association of Educational Researchers (AERA). 1995.

- **Hand in Hand: How Nine Urban Schools Work With Families and Community Services**. A book that provides support for educators, parents, and community representatives working to integrate social services in their schools. Published by the Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. 1995.

- **Preparing Your Child for College: A Resource Book for Parents**. A publication written by Elizabeth Eisner and Valentina K. Tikoff of the U.S. Department of Education that explains the benefits of a college education and how families can put college within reach academically and financially. 1995.

- **Strong Families, Strong Schools**. A handbook for strengthening families, along with supporting research, by the U.S. Department of Education. 1994.

- **Please Come to Open School Week**. A short guide from the United Federation of Teachers designed to help parents make the most of a visit to their child's school. 1994.

- **Together We Can**. A guide for crafting a profamily system of education and human services by Atelia I. Melaville, Center for the Study of Social Policy and Martin J. Blank, Institute for Educational Leadership, with Gelareh Asayesh. Published by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1993.

- **New Beginnings: A Guide to Designing Parenting Programs for Refugee and Immigrant Parents**. Daniel R. Scheinfeld, Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development. Published by International Catholic Child Bureau. 1993.

- **What Students Need to Know**. A manual for parents on how they can help with their children's schooling, by the National Urban League and The College Board. 1989.

ERIC/CUE DIGESTS

Reviews of educational publications about urban families.

- ☐ Beyond Culture: Communicating with Asian American Children and Families. 1993.
- ☐ Building a Successful Parent Center in an Urban School. 1993.
- ☐ Helping Young, Urban Parents Educate Themselves and Their Children. 1992.
- ☐ Increasing the School Involvement of Hispanic Parents. 1992.

[redacted]

Short articles addressed to parents about their children's schooling.

- ☐ New Information on Youth Who Drop Out: Why They Leave and What Happens to Them. 1995
- ☐ A Guide to Community Programs to Prevent Youth Violence. 1995.
- ☐ How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts. 1995.
- ☐ How to Prepare Your Children for Work. 1995.
- ☐ A Guide to Promoting Children's Education in Homeless Families. 1995
- ☐ A Community Guide to Youth Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Programs. 1994.
- ☐ A Guide to Communicating with Asian Families. 1994.
- ☐ A Guide to Computer Learning in Your Child's School. 1994.
- ☐ A Guide to Assessing and Placing Language Minority Students. 1994.
- ☐ Will a Focus School Meet the Needs of Your Child?. 1994.
- ☐ A Community Guide to Multicultural Education Programs. 1994.
- ☐ A Guide to Teaching English and Science Together. 1994.
- ☐ How to Promote the Science and Mathematics Achievement of Females and Minorities. 1994

[redacted]

Annotated bibliographies about urban familes.

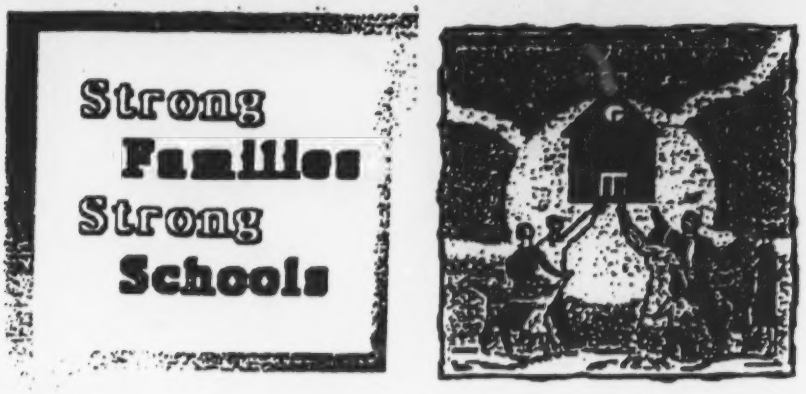
- ☐ School Choice Concerns of Urban Families. 1995.
- ☐ Parent Support for Preventing At-Risk Behavior by Urban Adolescents. 1995.
- ☐ Parenting Programs for Teenage Mothers. 1993.
- ☐ Parenting and Teenage Fathers. 1993.
- ☐ Parent Involvement of At-Risk Students. 1993.
- ☐ Services and Programs to Increase Family Involvement and Support. 1990.
- ☐ Parent Involvement in Urban Schools. 1989.
- ☐ Family Involvement in Asian/Pacific American Education. 1988.

Reference Gems

Including summaries of outstanding publications and publication announcements.

Other Internet Resources for Urban/Minority Families

Internet Address: http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong/



BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR LEARNING

Based on *Strong Families, Strong Schools*, written by Jennifer Ballen and Oliver Moles, for the national family initiative of the U.S. Department of Education

Web prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education for the U.S. Department of Education and the National Parent Information Network.

This Web provides:

- A review of the past 30 years of key research findings on the importance of involving families in their children's learning.
- Examples of family involvement efforts that are working.
- Concrete ways in which different participants in the family involvement partnership can help achieve success.

Links within this document will bring you to:

- The seven (7) **chapters** of *Strong Families, Strong Schools*.
- The **reference list** of *Strong Families, Strong Schools*, where you will find additional links to **ERIC abstracts**.
- **Other Web sites** related to families and family involvement in education.

Chapter 1: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: The benefits are numerous and lasting.

Families can help their children at home:

- Read together
- Use TV wisely
- Establish a daily family routine
- Schedule daily homework times
- Monitor out-of-school activities

- Talk with children and teenagers
- Communicate positive behaviors, values and character traits
- Expect achievement and offer praise

Families can help their children at school:

- Require challenging coursework for middle and secondary school students
- Keep in touch with the school
- Ask more from schools
- Use community resources
- Encourage your employer to get involved

Chapter 2: SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS: Schools must welcome parents and recognize their strengths.

Schools and families can work together to make schools safe.

- Establish family-school-community partnerships
- Make learning relevant to children
- Emphasize early childhood education

Families and schools can also team up to overcome barriers between them:

- Recognize parents' disconnection with public education
- Train teachers to work with parents
- Reduce cultural barriers and language barriers
- Evaluate parents' needs
- Accomodate families' work schedule
- Use technology to link parents to classrooms
- Make school visits easier
- Establish a home-school coordinator
- Promote family learning
- Give parents a voice in school decisions

Chapter 3: COMMUNITIES: Communities connect families and schools.

Community groups can increase family involvement in children's learning.

- Combat alcohol, drugs, and violence.
- Reinforce successful child-raising skills
- Provide mentoring programs
- Enlist community volunteers
- Utilize senior citizen volunteers
- Offer summer learning programs
- Link social services
- Encourage parental leadership

Chapter 4: "FAMILY-FRIENDLY" BUSINESSES:

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Many businesses recognize the need for parents to be involved in education.

- "Flex-time"
- Using the job site as a forum for parental support
- Child care options
- Form partnerships with schools

Chapter 5: STATES CONNECTING FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS:

Many states have developed family partnership programs.

- South Carolina
- California
- Utah
- Wisconsin
- Idaho
- Promote connections between families and schools.

Chapter 6: MAKING FEDERAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS SUPPORTIVE:

All agencies of the federal government can provide leadership to strengthen parental involvement through their policies and programs.

- Goals 2000: Educate America Act
- Family Involvement Partnership
- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- School-to-Work Opportunities Act
- Other family involvement programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education

Other federal departments support the family involvement initiative.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Justice
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

Return to UEweb home page.

Direct comments and questions about this web presentation to: Denise Gretchen dg119@columbia.edu

Part III:

Guides and Other Basic Resources Parents Can Draw Upon to Enhance Children's Learning and Performance

- helping your child with schoolwork
- consumer guide for self-help

Program Areas

Programs & Publications

Leader's Guide to Parent and Family Involvement—Weeks 19 & 20

Helping Parents Become Better Educators at Home

Parents Are Their Children's First Teachers

From birth to young adulthood, children depend on their parents to supply what they need—physically, emotionally, and socially—to grow and learn. That's a big job description. Like other job skills, parenting skills do not come naturally. They must be learned. As a national child advocacy organization, the PTA is in an ideal position to guide parents to the resources they need to be the best parents they can be. Following are suggested ways:

Provide parenting education classes and workshops.
Emphasize that good parenting doesn't take a Ph.D. It takes courage, patience, commitment, and common sense. Work with school and community organizations to provide programs on topics that will appeal to diverse groups in your PTA—topics such as discipline, parents as role models, self-esteem in children and in parents, parenting the difficult child, and how to meet the demands of work and family.

Help establish an early childhood PTA.
The best time to prepare parents for their part in their children's education is before their children start school. Contact the National PTA or your state PTA for information on how to start an early childhood PTA.

Establish family support programs.
Cooperate with your school and community agencies to establish family resource and support programs. These might include peer support groups for single, working, and custodial parents; parenting or substance abuse hotlines; literacy or ESL classes; job skills programs; preschool and early childhood education programs, or drop-in centers for parents with young children. Make a special effort to address the needs of teen parents.

Help publicize existing community resources.
If quality family resource centers or support programs for your community already exist, compile and circulate a descriptive list of local services that are available for families. Many parents do not seek the help they need because they are unaware that help exists.

Provide programs and opportunities for learning.
Show parents how to set the stage for learning at home. Conduct meetings and circulate videos or fliers describing educational parent-child activities.

Learning Begins at Home

Parents can set the stage for learning in everyday activities at home. Here's how.

- Set a good example by reading.

- Read to your children, even after they can read independently. Set aside a family reading time. Take turns reading aloud to each other.
- Take your children to the library regularly. Let them see you checking out books for yourself, too.
- Build math and reasoning skills together. Have young children help sort laundry, measure ingredients for a recipe, or keep track of rainfall for watering the lawn. Involve teens in researching and planning for a family vacation or a household project, such as planting a garden or repainting a room.
- Regulate the amount and content of the television your family watches. Read the weekly TV listing together and plan shows to watch. Monitor the use of videos and interactive game systems.
- Encourage discussions. Play family games. Practice good sportsmanship.
- Ask specific questions about school. Show your children that school is important to you so that it will be important to them.
- Help your children, especially teens, manage time. Make a chart showing when chores need to be done and when assignments are due.
- Volunteer. Build a sense of community and caring by giving of your time and energy. Choose projects in which children and teens can take part, too.

How Parents Can Help with Homework

Parents encourage good study habits by establishing homework routines early, such as the following:

- Come to an agreement with each of your children on a regular time and place for homework.
- Try to schedule homework time for when you or your children's caregiver can supervise.
- Make sure your children understand their assignment.
- Sign and date your young children's homework. Teachers appreciate knowing that the parents are interested enough to check over their children's homework and see that it is finished.
- Follow up on assignments by asking to see your children's homework after it has been returned by the teacher. Look at the teacher's comments to see if your children have done the assignment correctly.
- Discuss teachers' homework expectations during parent-teacher conferences.
- Don't do your children's homework. Make sure they understand that homework is their responsibility.
- Be sure to praise your children for a job well done. Encourage the good work that your children do, and comment about improvements they have made.

Your PTA can further encourage parents by working with teachers to plan workshops, develop

strategies, and prepare handouts on how parents can help with homework. Read the brochure *Helping Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework*.

Return to Leader's Guide page.

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HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD STUDY

Your Child's Education Rests on The Mastery of Three Important Skills

- Reading
- Writing
- Mathematics

An Effective Learning Process Is Made up of Four Steps

- Reading
- Understanding
- Remembering
- Reproducing in one's own thoughts and words,
    - either on paper,
    - in classroom recitation, or
    - in the case of mathematics, in solving new problems.

Time to Study

Set aside a special time each day for study time.

Place to Study

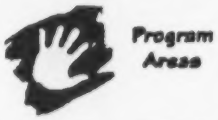
Select a place where there is GOOD LIGHTING.
The study area should be fairly quiet.
There should be NO DISTRACTIONS during study period:
-no radio, no t.v. , no friends visiting

Achievement Check List For Parents

- Spend time each day with your child on his/her homework.
- Examine work that is to be turned in.
- Work should be neat and clean.
- There should be no misspelled words.
- Question what is not clear.
- Hear work that is to be memorized.
- Check arithmetic work for neatness and cleanliness only.
- Check to see that all assigned homework has been completed.
- Check work that was returned by teacher for errors.
- Have child redo problems until work is correct.

The Most Important Weapons for Success Are

- Praise
- Encouragement
- Enthusiasm
- A good, kind ear.



Programs & Publications

Leader's Guide to Parent and Family Involvement--Weeks 3 & 4

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Self-Help

Three major types of nonprofessional resources are consumers' groups, parents' and self-help organizations, and media presentations such as popularized books and magazine articles.

Consumer information groups gather together and reproduce available information. A major resource for consumer information products is the Consumer Information Center (Department DD, Pueblo, CO 81009), an agency of the U.S. General Services Administration. It publishes a catalog listing booklets from almost 30 agencies of the federal government. Most of the booklets are free. Relevant available works include

- "Learning Disability: Not Just a Problem Children Outgrow"
- "Plain Talk About Children with Learning Disabilities"
- "Your Child and Testing"
- "Plain Talk About When Your Child Starts School"

You will also find here a series of small booklets for parents (at no cost) published by the U.S. Department of Education under the general heading of HELPING YOUR CHILD The list of specific titles include:

- Helping your child learn math.
- Helping your child learn history.
- Helping your child learn to read.
- Helping your child learn responsible behavior.
- Helping your child succeed in school.
- Helping your child with homework.
- Helping your child get ready for school.
- Helping your child improve in test taking.
- Helping your child learn to write well.
- Helping your child use the library.
- Helping your child learn geography.
- Helping your child learn science.

To order, contact:
Consumer Information Center (CIC)
18 F. St., NW Room G-142
Washington, DC 20405
Website: http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/

The Foundation for Children with Learning Disabilities (FCLD) is a privately funded organization established in 1977 with one of its primary goals to promote public awareness of learning disabilities. The group publishes a resource manual entitled "The FCLD Guide for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities." The guide provides basic information about learning disabilities (warning signs, guidelines for seeking help, children's rights, alter-natives beyond high school), lists sources of information and help, and includes an annotated list of relevant books, periodicals, directories, and audio-visual materials.
For a free copy, write :
FCLD, 99 Park Ave.,
New York, NY 10016.

The National Association of College Admissions Counselors publishes the "Guide for Learning Disabled Students," which lists schools that provide comprehensive programs for such students. To obtain a copy, write 9933 Lawler Ave., Suite 500, Skokie, IL 60077.

Higher Education and the Handicapped (HEATH) acts as a clearinghouse, providing information about secondary education for persons with learning disabilities. It offers fact sheets, lists of directories, and information about testing, types of programs, and organizations. Also available are bibliographies of recently published pamphlets and books about learning disabilities. Copies may be obtained by writing 1 Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Although the information in the materials cited here is presented clearly, not enough effort is made in these materials to clarify issues and consumer concerns.

Consumer advocate groups are more likely to provide the general public with critical as well as informative overviews of what to do and what not to do when faced with an educational, psychological, or medical problem. For example, an organization called Public Citizen (Health Research Group, 2000 P St., NW, Washington, DC 20036) has produced a number of booklets stressing consumer guidelines for careful selection of professional health services. Their approach provides information and instructs consumers in how to ask about and evaluate services to protect

themselves when shopping for and using professional help. Although their work has not focused specifically on learning problems, it is still relevant because practitioners who work with learning problems often model themselves after the medical and mental health professions. Three examples of the Health Research Group's products are

- "A Consumer's Guide to Obtaining Your Medical Records"
- "Through the Mental Health Maze: A Consumer's Guide to Finding a Psychotherapist, Including a Sample Consumer/Therapist Contract"
- "Consumer's Guide to Psychoactive Drugs"

There are books and books and books—some useful, some questionable. There are many texts, journals, and works primarily for professionals. Books for the general public are fewer and have mostly focused on simple explanations and advice. They tend to stress descriptions of the problem and offer suggestions about what parents might do to help their child. A few examples follow:

- Adelman, H. S. & Taylor, L. (1993). *Learning problems and learning disabilities: Moving forward.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Anderson, W., Chitwood, S., & Hayden, D. (1990). Negotiating the special education maze: A guide for parents and teachers. 2nd ed. Rockville, MD: Woodbine House.
- Bain, L. J. (1991) . A *parent's guide* to *attention deficit disorders.* New York: Delta.
- Ingersoll, B., & Goldstein, S. (1993). *Attention deficit disorder and learning disabilities: Realities, myths, and controversial treatments.* New York: Doubleday.
- Paltin, D.M. (1993). *The Parent's hyperactivity handbook: Helping the Fidgety Child.* New York: Insight Books.
- Selikowitz, M. (1995). *All About A.D.D.: Understanding Attention Deficit Disorder.* Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Rosner, J. (1987). *Helping children* overcome *learning difficulties: A step-by-step guide for parents and teachers* (rev. ed.). New York: Walker & Co.
- Smith, C. & Strick, L. (1997). *Learning Disabilities: A to Z.* New York: The Free Press.
- Wilson, N. *Optimizing special education: How parents can make a difference.* New York: Insight Books, 1992.
- Windell, J. *Discipline: A sourcebook of 50 failsafe techniques for parents.* New York: Collier Books.

Although there are many children's books with storylines designed to enhance youngsters' understanding of individual differences and learning problems, much rarer are nonfiction books aimed at providing information and suggestions to the student with a learning problem. One such book is

- Levine, M. (1990). *Keeping A head in school A student's book about learning abilities and learning disorders.* Cambridge,MA: Educators Publishing Service, Inc.

We hope you found this to be a useful resource. There's more where this came from!

This packet has been specially prepared by our Clearinghouse. Other Introductory Packets and materials are available. Resources in the Clearinghouse are organized around the following categories.

CLEARINGHOUSE CATEGORIES

Systemic Concerns

- Policy issues related to mental health in schools
- Mechanisms and procedures for program/service coordination
  - Collaborative Teams
  - School-community service linkages
  - Cross disciplinary training and interprofessional education
- Comprehensive, integrated programmatic approaches (as contrasted with fragmented, categorical, specialist oriented services)
- Issues related to working in rural, urban, and suburban areas
- Restructuring school support service
  - Systemic change strategies
  - Involving stakeholders in decisions
  - Staffing patterns
  - Financing
  - Evaluation, Quality Assurance
  - Legal Issues
- Professional standards
- Other System Topics: _____

Programs and Process Concerns:

- Clustering activities into a cohesive, programmatic approach
  - Support for transitions
  - Mental health education to enhance healthy development & prevent problems
  - Parent/home involvement
  - Enhancing classrooms to reduce referrals (including prereferral interventions)
  - Use of volunteers/trainees
  - Outreach to community
  - Crisis response
  - Crisis and violence prevention (including safe schools)
- Staff capacity building & support
  - Cultural competence
  - Minimizing burnout
- Interventions for student and family assistance
  - Screening/Assessment
  - Enhancing triage & ref. processes
  - Least Intervention Needed
  - Short-term student counseling
  - Family counseling and support
  - Case monitoring/management
  - Confidentiality
  - Record keeping and reporting
  - School-based Clinics
- Other program and process concerns: _____

Psychosocial Problems

- Drug/alcoh. abuse
- Depression/suicide
- Grief
- Dropout prevention
- Learning Problems
- Pregnancy prevention/support
- Eating problems (anorexia, bulim.)
- Physical/Sexual Abuse
- Neglect
- Gangs
- Self-esteem
- Relationship problems
- Anxiety
- Disabilities
- Gender and sexuality
- Reactions to chronic illness
- School Adjustment (including newcomer acculturation)
- Other Psychosocial problems: _____